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Senate approves Great Lakes Compact to safeguard Michigan waters

The Senate recently approved legislation that will adopt the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact to further safeguard Michigan waters and implement a landmark assessment process to evaluate the impacts of proposed large water withdrawals.

Senate Bill 212 would adopt the compact which develops common measures for each state in the basin to regulate in-state withdrawals and prohibits out-of-basin water diversions. Key provisions in the bills will ensure that the Michigan Legislature be involved in any changes to the compact and preserves the state's authority to conduct its own water management program.

The compact clarifies that water withdrawals originating within a state are to be regulated solely under state law without intervention from the Great Lakes Council, other states or the federal government. It also requires each Great Lakes state to implement a water management plan that will assess withdrawals from the basin. Senate Bill 860 fulfills this requirement by adopting the withdrawal assessment process developed by the Groundwater Conservation Advisory Council.

Other bills in the package would:

- Establish the Water Resources Conservation Council (a new version of the Groundwater Conservation Advisory Council, which had been dissolved by the governor) and adds new member organizations and responsibilities for the council;
- Lower the current permit requirement threshold to 200,000 gallons a day for bottled water producers;
- Apply one standard of two million gallons a day for a proposed withdrawal from any community water supply; and
- Increase fines to \$10,000 per day for knowingly violating water-permitting provisions.

The science-based water management package is designed to protect Michigan's environment, while not unnecessarily restricting the growth of the state's economy. The legislation has support from the Michigan United Conservation Clubs and business groups such as the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, Michigan Farm Bureau, and Michigan Manufacturers Association.

Senate Bills 212, 723, 727, 858, 859 and 860 will now advance to the House for consideration.

Bill would help qualified service members obtain commercial drivers' licenses

The state Senate unanimously approved legislation recently enabling qualified military personnel to obtain commercial drivers' licenses (CDLs) without having to take the CDL skills test.

Currently, certain military truck drivers are exempt from federal CDL requirements as long as they are active duty. While the exemption does not apply to personnel who were recently discharged, federal law permits the U.S. secretary of transportation to issue waivers to states that exempt recently discharged personnel from taking CDL skills tests.

The United States Armed Forces own and operate more than 50,000 heavy trucks and buses. Job training for the operators of these vehicles consists of nine weeks of basic training and six weeks of advanced individual training, including practice in driving several types of military vehicles.

Senate Bill 1211 allows the secretary of state to waive the driving skills test if an applicant meets specific requirements and applies for a CDL within one year of being honorably discharged.

The bill now heads to the Michigan House for consideration.

Senate committee hears testimony on copper theft plague

Members of the Senate Economic Development and Regulatory Reform Committee recently heard testimony from businesses and individuals plagued by the rise of valuable metal theft.

Communications infrastructure such as 9-1-1 service is carried on copper wires. When the wires are cut, stolen and stripped, residents and communities can lack access to emergency services like police, fire and ambulance responders. While Detroit leads the nation in occurrences of copper theft, the problem is widespread across Michigan.

The pending legislation was introduced at the request of law enforcement officials and farmers. If signed into law, the bill would help curb copper theft by requiring individuals selling scrap metal to show photo identification.

Likewise, scrap dealers would be required to make and maintain a copy of the ID. Dealers are then required to provide a copy of their records to law enforcement officials on a weekly basis.

Bills introduced to reduce unnecessary government red-tape on businesses

Legislation aimed at improving state department and agency operations by reducing unnecessary governmental regulations on businesses was recently introduced in the Senate.

Senate Bill 1302 would require state agencies to indicate if proposed departmental rule changes exceed existing federal standards. Agencies would also have to specify if the rule change would allow departments to compete against the private sector for the service or program.

Senate Bill 1303 would require state agencies to identify administrative remedies for problems that could arise as a result of new rules. Both bills have been referred to the Senate Government Operations and Reform Committee for consideration.

Contact information

Thank you for your interest in our current state issues. If you would like to receive future legislative updates via e-mail, or have any questions or concerns, please contact my office at www.SenatorJohnPappageorge.com or by calling 517-373-2523.

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